GEELONG NATURALIST

Quarterly magazine of the Geelong Field Naturalists Club

In this issue...

Vale Margaret Cameron

Stawell weekend excursion

Birding trails of Geelong

Imperial Jezebels

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The GFNC respects, studies and explores the land, skies, waterways, plants and wildlife of our region, Wadawurrung Country.

GEELONG NATURALIST

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The magazine provides a channel for Club members and others to share and communicate their knowledge and research on natural history.

SUBMISSIONS

Submissions of a scientific nature or as informal contributions are welcome and will be due on **3 March** for the March issue. Email to **naturalist@gfnc.org.au**

Guidelines for contributors can be downloaded from **www.gfnc.org.au/about-us/publications**

COVER IMAGE

Female Silky Hairstreak, Anglesea, 12/09/2023. An unusual sighting in our region.

Image by John Newman.

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

At the time of writing, the observation period of the 2023 Great Southern Bioblitz (GSB) has only just finished, with observations still being added. The number of observations seems strong, despite two wet days and it being late in the season. There will be a report in the next edition of the *Geelong Naturalist* once we have final data. Thanks to Rod Lowther for coordinating the Geelong project and to Pete Crowcroft for Surf Coast/Otways. In 2024 Pete will coordinate the City Nature Challenge (April 26–29) where we have a combined project covering the whole region and Rod and Pete will continue to respectively coordinate the two GSB projects (September 27–30).

The Geelong Nature Festival closed out with an event on Sunday October 29 at the Botanic Gardens, which included a large-scale art project. As for the GSB, the next edition of the *Naturalist* will have a summary of activities; the plan is that the next major event will be in 2025. The club contributed $2500 to the cost of the Festival and managed the spending of similar sized contributions from the CCMA and DEECA.

The 2024 AGM will be held on Tuesday 9 April, and we will be electing the Committee for the following 12 months. As always, we are keen to get some new faces on the committee; we can always find tasks for those who don't want to take that step. It might be leading excursions; liaising with speakers; restarting the plant group; managing membership; helping with the production of the *Geelong Naturalist*; helping organise GFNC participation at events such as Nature Festivals, the ANGAIR show, Clean Up Australia Days or Botanic Gardens Open days; managing or creating content for our social media or web site; getting involved with the Conservation, Publications, or Program sub-committees; or representing the club on various external groups. So, ask yourself whether you can contribute to the day-to-day running of the club, however small. Talk to any committee member if you think you can help.

Membership fees for 2024 remain the same as they have been for several years, at $40 for ordinary members, $60 for couples/ families, $20 for part time students and $10 for full time students. Some of you have already paid for 2024 so please don't pay until you get a personalised notice in January, when we'll also ask you to advise any changes in the contact details we have on file. Fees will be due by 31 March.

Utricularia grampiana
Grampians bladderwort
Photo: Bernie Lingham

Three Jacks Wildflower Sanctuary
Photo: Alison Watson

Long-billed Corellas
Photo: Graham Possingham

Some photos from the weekend trip to Stawell, report page 12.

Vale Margaret Cameron AM

10 September 1937–29 September 2023

Marilyn Hewish

Margaret arranged much of her life around birding. She was born in Queensland and after working as a librarian and taking up birding there, she lived in Adelaide, then Sydney, and then she moved to Geelong to work at the Deakin University Library. I heard that when asked by the interview panel why she'd chosen Deakin she told them it was because it was close to Werribee Sewage Farm. She had interviewed the Sewage Farm earlier and found it satisfactory. It wasn't long before she joined the GFNC (1977) and began to make her mark there.

I joined the GFNC because of Margaret. I joined the RAOU by going in person to the headquarters. When asked if I had any favourite birds. I foolishly said 'Waders' as I'd just managed to identify a few common ones a few weeks before. I was introduced to Brett Lane who ran the Wader Studies Programme and he signed me up for the next National Wader Count; the region, Geelong; the co-ordinator, Margaret Cameron. When I phoned her she invited me to stay for the weekend. I found out later that Margaret's house was birding central, with a passing population of birders of all levels of expertise, including those of national and international renown. She once described coming home late one night and almost falling over a birder friend from Darwin sleeping on her front doorstep. She went to every RAOU Congress and camp-out and just loved being among keen birders. Many international travellers she met on these on trips ended up at her house for a tour of Geelong's birding hotspots. All were welcome. A birding couple from Germany stayed for months when the woman had a medical emergency delaying the planned return home. When they said with a touch of panic, 'Where are we going to stay?' Margaret said, 'With me of course'. Speakers at each GFNC Bird Meeting were invited for dinner beforehand and I was as well. That's how I made contact with the best. I didn't say much at these dinners but I certainly listened and learnt. She was a tireless networker.

On that first Wader Count Margaret showed me ten 'lifers' including a Black Falcon. She described each feature as the bird glided overhead. Also on a Wader Count, Margaret told me how to differentiate the calls of Little and Australian Ravens. It was a revelation to me that birds could be distinguished by calls and it opened a new world to me. I was impressed by her energy, her organisational abilities, her knowledge, her eagerness to share the thrill of birding and her satisfaction in contributing to science and conservation. Margaret was an organisational dynamo and her capacity for hard work was enormous. At the time Margaret edited the *Geelong Naturalist*, ran the local OBP, Hooded Plover, Wader and Challenge Counts, started our Geelong region Twitchathon team from the beginning, organised the GFNC Bird Group speakers and many excursions and was Regional Co-ordinator for the two RAOU National Bird Atlases. It was Margaret's idea to start the *Geelong Bird Report* as a separate publication and she was a co-editor for many years until she returned to Queensland. Margaret was awarded Life Membership of the GFNC in 2004. On a wider scale she was President of the RAOU (now BirdLife Australia) and served on many nature management, research and conservation committees up to the highest political level. In her spare time (!) she served the Geelong community through charities, student exchanges and organisations such as her church and Rotary. In 1990, Margaret was made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to libraries, education and ornithology. She had a windcheater that said, 'Which committee is this and who am I representing?' She told me her secrets for running successful meetings: make sure everyone has a chance to speak on each issue and never let anyone say the same thing twice.

Margaret sought adventure and one of her great loves was travelling in search of birds, particularly throughout Australasia

and south-east Asia. She came back with some hair-raising tales. The story of the boat capsizing at sea in the middle of the night served her well. I often went birding with Margaret locally and on long trips Australia-wide and her schedule was punishing. Her cry was, 'Come on troops' if we were a bit slow getting out of the car. She wouldn't let us eat crunchy food on Twitchathons as the sounds might disturb the birds and she reprimanded Gary Backhouse and me for stopping to look at orchids. I remember her harassing Liz Kerr for a decision on whether we were hearing a Bush Stone-curlew from a cattle paddock at midnight near Bendigo. Liz's answer after much hesitation was, 'Well, it's not a cow.' Dean and I visited Margaret in Ipswich and found ourselves whisked off within a few minutes of arrival to Burren Junction, central NSW, to see the Grey-headed Lapwing. Margaret had a strong constitution. She could drive for hundreds and thousands of kilometres in search of birds. She could go without sleep. She could walk and climb with people decades her junior. She always got sea-sick on boats but she continued because of the attraction of seeing new seabirds. A friend of hers told me there were trips when she would lie on the deck looking green. At someone's shout announcing a new bird, she'd raise her head, take a look, and then collapse back down. Margaret said that, like Paddy Pallin, she was 'Never Truly Lost.' She would lead me deep into the bush until I had no idea how to get back. Though we'd twisted and turned in pursuit of birds, she always led us back safely and by a direct route. I learned to trust her in the bush. She said she didn't really know how she did it.

Margaret wasn't a scientist by profession but she understood scientific thinking and her belief in its value was strong. She brought this to every discussion, everything she wrote or edited and every committee she ran. The *Geelong Naturalist* especially benefited from her rigorous approach and she changed the course of the GFNC by leading us into scientifically based national bird projects. She was a supporter all her life of projects run by the RAOU in the cause of knowledge and conservation. In addition to Margaret's belief in the power of knowledge, she understood that this knowledge needs to be accessible to be useful. Craig Morley remembers that Margaret's mantra was, 'If it hasn't been published in the public domain or submitted to a freely accessible database, then it didn't happen'.

I had a special conversation over lunch with Margaret and Richard Loyn at an RAOU Congress. We all admitted that we were shy when young, and then we reacted with surprise at this admission from the other two. Margaret said she learned to speak up and gained confidence from needing to advocate for birds. She found her purpose and the people with whom she was happy and fulfilled. Richard and I felt exactly the same. The GFNC thus fulfilled part of Margaret's life plan and was of great value to her.

In many obituaries by way of balance, there's a small section hidden away at the end saying the person 'didn't suffer fools gladly.' Margaret would say what she thought. She was always on the side of efficiency and rationality. Her brusque manner could be a surprise to strangers. For me, this was just Margaret. There was never any nastiness or arrogance in it. She tended to downplay her own achievements. She was surprised and a little embarrassed to receive Life Membership from the GFNC. She treated everyone the same, from beginner birders and the homeless people she supported through her church to her memorable meeting with Jeff Kennett. This sometimes didn't go down well with those who thought highly of themselves and those in positions of power.

Birds, bird people, the GFNC and BirdLife Australia were some of Margaret's great loves. She devoted her life to these things, had an enormous influence and left an enormous legacy. For her family, friends and strangers, she was the kindest and most generous person. She was and still is deeply admired and loved.

Margaret cutting the cake at the GFNC 50th anniversary celebrations in 2011
Photo: Barry Lingham

Bird Group excursion report

Long Forest

28 September 2023

Brad Ferrier

A mild morning with a potentially sunny day greeted an enthusiastic group of 21 attendees at our meeting place on the bend of Canopus Circuit, Long Forest. It was warm and heartening to hear the bird banter and other social conversations of the group.

We had the pleasure of the company of three of GFNC's outstanding bird 'brains'. Marilyn Hewish (accompanied by Dean Hewish), probably the most knowledgeable person about all things in front of and around us; Craig Morley with his excellent bird knowledge and birding skills; and one of the best set of bird ears in the game, Troy Zanker.

We performed our usual introductions, an acknowledgment of traditional owners, safety, and general discussion of the locale in which we stood. The mornings wandering took us to Long Point Track and we immediately observed how dry it was at this higher altitude, a clear lack of bird life was a common comment.

As we descended the gradual grade towards the watercourse, it was clear that the vegetation was changing. Here it became much greener, being mostly sheltered from winds that cause high rates of evapotranspiration. Bird life became apparent with the sighting of many species.

Underfoot we found interesting evidence of geological processes that had occurred over millions of years, with bedding planes ranging from near horizontal to 90 degrees of inclination. A few stood and pondered the twisting and folding of strata.

Long Forest is home to Bull Mallee *Eucalyptus behriana*. Mallee are species of eucalypt that are multi-stemmed, all stems arising from a basal lignotuber. This is the most southerly distribution of Bull Mallee in Victoria, otherwise it is found north of The Great Dividing Range.

The forest also comprises superb specimens of Blue Box *Eucalyptus baueriana*, at this time in full bloom with creamy white flowers. Here we found many species of nectivorous birds such as Eastern Spinebills, Red Wattlebirds and Yellow-faced, Yellow-tufted, New Holland, White-naped and Brown-headed Honeyeaters. Mistletoebirds, White-throated Treecreepers, Silvereyes and Grey Fantail were a joy to watch. Corvids and White-winged Choughs made themselves known. Sounds of Rufous and Golden Whistlers and Grey Shrike Thrushes were a delight to our ears.

We saw three species of thornbill and both Spotted and Striated Pardalotes. Three species of cuckoo could be heard, and we were surprised by the sight of two Brown Goshawks flying overhead.

At midday we agreed to share lunch one kilometre east at the Happy Valley Track car park picnic tables. A buffet of homemade lunches and conversation followed.

After most participants departed, a few of us with a birding post-lunch appetite walked down Happy Valley Track for approximately 300 m. We were delightfully rewarded with the sighting of a young male Scarlet Honeyeater. It was decided that it doesn't get any better than that for a day of birding, and we headed for home.

Special thanks to Marilyn for her expertise and to Karyn Brown for her excellent rapid snap of the Scarlet Honeyeater (below). Thanks also to Craig for providing the bird lists: Long Point Track, entrance to Happy Valley Track.

'Twas a fine day all round.

Scarlet Honeyeater
Photo: Karyn Brown

Bird Group excursion report

Forrest

26 October 2023

Trevor Hodson

On a cloudy and cool morning our group of 20 members and guests met at the car park at the Kaanglang Road bridge on the outskirts of Forrest. It was a great pleasure to welcome Trevor Pescott, a GFNC Life Member, to the walk. Libby Hogg was there for her first outing with us and Trevor Deutrom was a guest who proved very able at spotting fauna in the canopy.

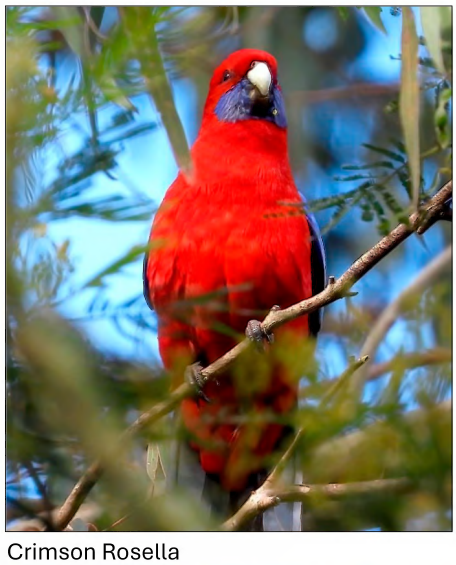
The walk started on the east bank of the West Branch of the Barwon River. This area has undergone extensive riparian restoration by Barwon Water, with attention to the removal of blackberry and ensuring indigenous plants suitable for different vegetation layers were planted. The growth in the last five years has been quite amazing.

A wide gravel path winds along the bank and to the east is the natural forest with its tall eucalypts and dense understorey. Small birds were absent initially but we were greeted by a number of Pacific Black Ducks in the stream. These were followed by a Dusky Moorhen. A Laughing Kookaburra flew through and calls from Pied Currawongs were heard.

Overhead we were treated to two groups of Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos with their elongated silhouettes, slow wing beats and distinctive call. Not long after, a pair of Gang-gang Cockatoos alerted us to their presence with their 'squeaky door' call. These birds crisscrossed our paths over the next hour. A raptor sighting is always exciting but the brief glimpse we had of one allowed for much speculation but no confirmation of just what it was.

As we meandered along the well-kept path the smaller birds became active in the reed beds and plantings along the river bank. Most prominent were Grey Fantails, at least 12 or more, flitting around and letting us know they were about. Showy male Superb Fairywrens put on a great show with their mates busy in the background. From the forested area to the east, Grey Shrikethrushes called and from the west bank we heard a Grey Butcherbird singing its tuneful song. There was a flyover of seven Great Cormorants, possibly heading to the reservoir. Later we disturbed a Little Pied Cormorant in the waterway.

In the stream we noted a single Australasian Grebe in full breeding colouration with the prominent yellow at the gape, dark face and chestnut on the back of the neck. Honeyeaters



Crimson Rosella

Eastern Yellow Robin

Superb Fairywren

Photos: Linden Young

were playing hard to see but calls were heard regularly and identified—Yellow-faced and White-naped, and Red Wattlebirds. At one stage we heard a White-throated Treecreeper with its prolonged peeping, contrasting with the shorter piping call of a nearby Eastern Yellow Robin. It was a lesson for us all. A single Koala was noted high up in a tall eucalypt.

Brown Thornbills and White-browed Scrubwrens were active in the understorey. A Golden Whistler alerted us to its presence and was eventually seen. When we crossed over the bridge to start our return to the carpark a number of Australian Magpies were seen on the open grassland below the reservoir wall. Striated Pardalotes called along the way. Welcome Swallows were busy flying back and forth along the stream, looking for insects coming off the water. As we returned to the carpark a group of 10 Australian Wood Ducks were seen downstream of the bridge in a grassy paddock. We were also privileged to spot a Koala high up along the way.

After a brief gathering for morning tea and a run through the bird count, we moved on to the Tiger Rail Trail (Birregurra-Forrest Rail Trail), backtracking through Forrest. This was another pleasant walk through forest that had been burnt about 18 months ago. It is part of the extensive mountain bike trails centred on Forrest and maintained by Parks Victoria.

Whether it was the cool weather or the wind, the birds were widely scattered. We needed good ears to recognise calls to help compile our list. We encountered a bright yellow worm of about 30 mm on the path and follow-up indicated it was a Canary Worm. Quite apt for a bird group outing. Both Striated and Spotted Pardalotes were about, as were Brown and Striated Thornbills. Crimson Rosellas were also in the canopy and the distinctive call of the Grey Shrikethrush beckoned. One can rely on Grey Fantails to be about and we heard both Rufous and Golden Whistlers on the way. Pied Currawongs and Australian Magpies were present. A lucky few heard an Eastern Spinebill and spotted a Black-faced Cuckooshrike.

At the turnaround point we came across a patch of orchids; one was identified as Pink Fingers *Caladenia carnea* and the other as Common Bird Orchid *Chiloglottis valida*. On our return leg it was a delight to see another Koala high up in the canopy after hearing its roar.

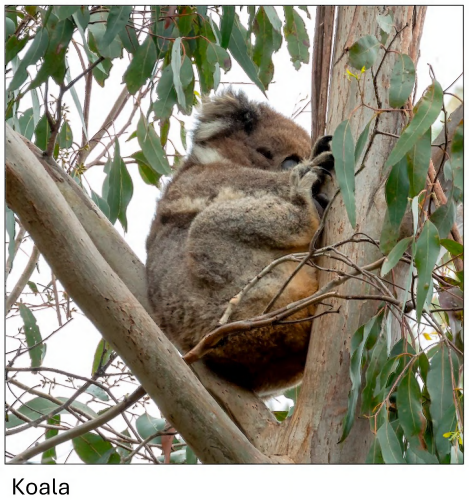
All in all, a pleasurable day out and the rain held off till we said our goodbyes. The photos are courtesy of Graham Possingham and Linden Young.

Thanks to Graham Possingham for providing the bird lists: West Barwon overflow and Tiger Loop, Forrest.

Canary Worm *Fletchamia sugdeni*

Pink Fingers *Caladenia carnea*

Common Bird Orchid *Chiloglottis valida*



Koala

Photos: Graham Possingham

Bird Group excursion report

Lake Ayrey and the Birregurra Golf Course

23 November 2023

Trevor Hodson

After two previous attempts to conduct this outing, the day arrived when it finally happened. A group of 20 members and guests were in attendance. A welcome to Libby Hogg out for the second time, with some guests as well and to Tony Hall out with us for the first time. Melissa Rutheford joined us as a guest. John Renowden was out with us too. The sky was overcast with a steady breeze but otherwise fair weather, with sunshine breaking out when we arrived at the Golf Course.

Lake Ayrey Wildlife Reserve is named after Charles Ayrey who purchased land including Mount Gellibrand, previously leased by Alex Dennis, in the mid-1800s. Charles was a renowned sheep breeder. The lake has benefited greatly from the last three years of above average rainfall and despite other wetlands in the district drying out in the last two months, is still holding a good amount of water, waterbirds and waders.

Those first on the scene spotted a Glossy Ibis, partially hidden by reeds but soon delighting all by coming out into the open. There were nineteen White-necked Herons scattered about and about a dozen White-faced Herons too. Grey Teal were in good numbers, over a hundred, and there were smaller numbers of Pacific Black Duck and Chestnut Teal. Australasian Swamphens and Eurasian Coots were in abundance. A family of Black Swans was noted with a number of advanced young taking on their adult size and plumage. Seven Australian White Ibis were seen on the western shore. Three Australian Pelicans were noted flying to the north east.

Keen eyes found two egrets at the northern end of the reserve, one quite large and in keeping with a Great Egret, the other smaller, and after much head scratching and close observation it was felt to be a Plumed Egret. Photos taken confirmed these thoughts. The photographer, as he approached the egrets, flushed a group of seven Nankeen Night Herons that then circled overhead before drifting away. A large flight of Welcome Swallows worked overhead, numbering about 50 in total. There were occasional Australian Magpies and a single Little Raven on the grass between the road and the water's edge. A Willie Wagtail perched briefly on the fence and a male Superb Fairywren delighted us all, perched in full view. A lucky few saw a Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo.

In the middle of the wetland was a group of about forty Pied Stilts. It was a very fetching sight. Masked Lapwings were dotted around the shores along with a single Magpie-lark. At the southern of the reserve is a dam just outside the

Glossy Ibis with a Masked Lapwing in the background
Photo: Jeff Dagg

Great Egret with a Plumed Egret
Photo: Graham Possingham

Horsfield's Bronze-Cuckoo
Photo: Graham Possingham

boundary fence and as we approached, four Black-tailed Nativehens were spotted feeding in a marshy spot. As we made our way back to our vehicles we were greeted with a number of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers nestled in the vegetation in the wetland. In the background throughout the morning we heard the calls of Grey Shrikethrushes and Red Wattlebirds.

Next stop was the Birregurra Golf Course where we stopped at some picnic tables on the Heritage Walk for morning tea and to confirm our bird count for the reserve. On the Golf Course we needed to pay attention for a few golfers were about but I am happy to report all was well. The Golf Course runs beside the Barwon River and the Birregurra Landcare Group over the last 10 years has been busy restoring and enhancing the plantings in the riparian zone. It's a place for woodland birds. First birds seen were Grey Fantails and Superb Fairywrens. Following a path into a more densely wooded area we encountered Brown Thornbills, a White-browed Scrubwren and an Eastern Yellow Robin. Magpies patrolled the fairways and a Spotted Pardalote called as well as a Grey Shrikethrush. Various Honeyeaters were either seen or heard and included New Holland, White-plumed and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Red Wattlebirds. A female Golden Whistler was seen and heard. It was encouraging to see the growth that has occurred in the Landcare group's plantings of native but not always indigenous species.

We returned to the picnic table to do our list and then those wishing to stay met up at Otway Artisan Bakery for a happy lunch and continued conversation.

Thanks to Jeff Dagg and Graham Possingham for keeping our bird lists and making the day one to remember with the variety of species seen. Photos courtesy of Jeff, Graham and the author.

Bird lists: Lake Ayrey, Birregurra Golf Course.

Black-tailed Nativehen
Photo: Jeff Dagg

Pied Stilts with a White-necked Heron in the background
Photo: Jeff Dagg

Excursion report

Ted Errey Nature Circuit (TENC)

Brisbane Ranges National Park (BRNP)

17 September 2023

Barry Lingham

Introduction

Ted Errey was a Geelong Field Naturalists Club Life Member and contributed outstanding service to the club. As a long-serving committee member, he held many positions including President, Treasurer and Newsletter Editor. Ted was a skilled botanist and in 2001 the club, in conjunction with Parks Victoria, opened the TENC to acknowledge his contribution to knowledge of the flora of the Brisbane Ranges.

The 9 km circuit trail passes through some of the most interesting scenery and diverse habitats of the BRNP. A series of interpretive signs was developed by the GFNC and placed at various locations to inform and enhance the experience of those using the trail. Unfortunately, most of the signs have now deteriorated and need replacement.

GFNC circuit walk highlights

Club members Colin and Wendy Cook shared interesting details of the history of the Brisbane Ranges, including information about the Lower Stony Creek Reservoir located just upstream of the Stony Creek Picnic Area. The dam was constructed in 1874 to supply Geelong with fresh water, becoming only the third concrete dam constructed in the world. The design and construction were so successful that the dam was in use for over 120 years and it still retains a substantial volume of water.

Colin also outlined the extensive bushfire that ravaged the area in 2006, burning over 6000 ha. The evidence of that fire can still be seen through the many saplings in Anakie Gorge that germinated after the fire. Many have now grown to heights of up to 10 m. The saplings have started to thin out as they grow, but it may be another hundred years before they are fully grown trees.

Our group completed the full circuit in just over five hours, including breaks for snacks and lunch. We moved at a slower pace to allow time to view and identify the flowers and birds along the route. The circuit also provides an excellent opportunity to view geological features such as faults and folds exposed along the gorge, plus rock types such as sandstone and slate. Distant views of the granitic You Yangs, the basaltic Werribee plains and eruption points of the volcanic Anakies add to the geological experience.

The best sites to see the Brisbane Ranges flora were Sections 3 and 4 of the route in the upper plateau zone (see Map 1). Orchid species seen on the day were from the *Acianthus, Cyrtostylis, Caladenia, Glossodia, Pterostylis* and *Thelymitra* genera. Flowering plants from the Fabaceae (peas) were well represented with *Pultenaea* and *Dillwynia* species being the most common. Heathland plants included *Leucopogon* and *Grevillea* species, with the endemic Brisbane Ranges Grevillea *Grevillea steiglitziana* bushes in full flower in Section 3 (see plant list at the end of this report).

A total of 28 bird species were noted during the walk, mostly in the gorge section. Highlights included the lovely Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Olive-backed Oriole, three species of cuckoo, and many honeyeaters.

Thank you

Special thanks to Wendy for the plant list and Brad for the eBird list. Thanks to Colin for sharing his knowledge of the history of the area and also providing access to historical documentation.

Details of the Ted Errey Nature Circuit (TENC)

Map 1 Ted Errey Nature Circuit

The TENC can be walked in either direction and can begin at any of several points. Our excursion began at the Stony Creek Picnic Area which is accessed via Switch Road, off the Geelong-Ballan Road. Switch Road is poorly signposted and the turnoff is hard to spot, but it is about 150 m west of the Clarkes Road intersection. An alternative starting point could be where the TENC crosses Switch Road (Red Beak Track) or you could walk in from Anakie Gorge and complete a longer walk.

Section 1. Anakie Gorge

From Stony Creek Picnic Area, walk east along the Anakie Gorge Track for about 2.1 km. The walk through the gorge is shaded by the saplings that emerged after the 2006 bushfire. There are many bush birds to be seen along the way.

Section 2. Ascending out of Anakie Gorge to Nelson's Lookout

Leave the Anakie Gorge Track and head uphill in a southerly direction. The track here is quite steep with loose rocks—walking poles are useful in this section. There is little shade and sparse undergrowth beneath the stunted trees. The walk ascends approximately 110 m from the gorge to the plateau at the top. Once the plateau is reached, the track bends to the west and the terrain is fairly flat. Wildflowers begin to be more numerous.

Where the main track follows the fence line and bends sharply to the south, divert straight ahead for 175 m to Nelson's Lookout. Take a seat there and admire the views over the Brisbane Ranges and as far as Melbourne. This is a good spot for a break or for bird watching.

Section 3. Nelson Lookout to the intersection with Switch Road

Retrace your steps back to the main trail and continue south for 300 m. The main track bends to the west but a short diversion along the fence line will allow views of the You Yangs, the western part of Port Phillip Bay and the northern section of the Bellarine Peninsula.

As you walk westward, a wide variety of flowering plants are visible during spring, with the changing geology and soils creating changes in the types of flora. Continue on to the intersection with Switch Road. The main TENC track does an interesting loop through the forest before returning back to Switch Road. For a shortcut take the path parallel to the road before crossing Switch Road to rejoin the TENC at Red Beak Track.

Section 4. Switch Road to Ted Errey Lookout

Continue westward along Red Beak Track. Outlook Track can be used as a short cut. However, the wildflowers along the main circuit are some of the most impressive in the Brisbane Ranges so it is recommended that the western loop is completed. Where the circuit loop rejoins Outlook Track, divert to the Ted Errey Lookout which is a lovely spot to have lunch and take a break.

Section 5. Ted Errey Lookout to Stony Creek Picnic Area

Returning to the main TENC, the track drops steeply and heads northwards—walking poles are again useful as the track has loose rocks. Nearing the bottom of the descent, a boardwalk crossing is encountered as the track passes through a wetter zone with very different habitat. Ascending over the next rise leads to another interesting zone where thicker understorey creates good habitat for small birds. The track then continues descending slowly northwards until the finish point at Stony Creek Picnic Area is reached.

References for further information:

Engineering Heritage Victoria (2018) *Nomination of the Lower Stony Creek Dam to the Engineering Heritage Recognition Program*.

PPK Environment & Infrastructure Ltd. (2001) *Anakie Water Supply Reserve—Flora and Fauna Survey Report* (commissioned by Barwon Water re environmental effects of decommissioning the Lower Stony Creek Reservoir).

Select list of plants, TENC

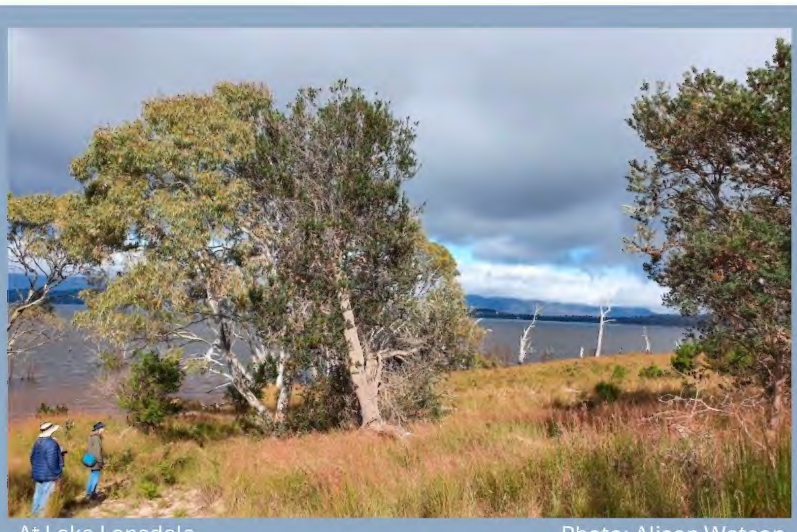
PLANTS (in flower)

Acacia aculeatissima	Thin-leaf Wattle	*Prostanthera decussata*	Dense Mint-bush
Acacia paradoxa	Hedge Wattle	*Pultenaea daphnoides*	Large-leaf Bush-pea
Acacia pycnantha	Golden Wattle	*Pultenaea gunnii* ssp. *tuberculata*	Golden Bush-pea
Argentipallium obtusifolium	Blunt Everlasting	*Pultenaea laxiflora*	Loose-flower Bush-pea
Banksia marginata	Silver Banksia	*Pultenaea scabra*	Rough Bush-pea
Brachyscome multifida	Cut-leaf Daisy	*Ranunculus* sp.	Buttercup
Brachyscome sp.	Daisy	*Senecio linearifolius*	Fireweed Groundsel
Chrysocephalum baxteri	Fringed Everlasting	*Stackhousia monogyna*	Creamy candles
Comesperma volubile	Love Creeper	*Stuartina muelleri*	Spoon Cudweed
Craspedia variabilis	Common Billy-button	*Styphelia fletcheri* ssp. *brevisepala*	Twin-flower Beard-heath
Dianella revoluta var. *revoluta*	Black-anther Flax-lily	*Tetratheca bauerifolia*	Heath Pink-bells
Dillwynia ramosissima	Bushy Parrot-pea	*Thysanotus patersonii*	Twining Fringe-lily
Dillwynia sericea	Showy Parrot-pea	*Wahlenbergia* sp.	Bluebell
Epacris impressa	Common Heath	*Wurmbea dioica* ssp. *dioica*	Early Nancy
Eucalyptus leucoxolyn	Yellow Gum	**ORCHIDS**	
Goodenia geniculata	Bent Goodenia	*Acianthus caudatus*	Mayfly Orchid
Grevillea rosmarinifolia	Rosemary Grevillea	*Acianthus pusillus*	Mosquito Orchid
Grevillea steiglitziana	Brisbane Ranges Grevillea	*Caladenia fuscata*	Dusky Fingers
Hibbertia riparia	Upright Guinea-flower	*Caladenia parva*	Green-comb Spider-orchid
Isopogon ceratophyllus	Horny Cone-bush	*Cyrtostylis reniformis*	Gnat Orchid
Kennedia prostrata	Running Postman	*Glossodia major*	Wax-lip Orchid
Leucopogon virgatus	Common Beard-heath	*Pterostylis concinna*	Trim Greenhood
Millotia tenuifolia var. *tenuifolia*	Soft Milotia	*Pterostylis melagramma*	Tall Greenhood
Opercularia varia	Variable Stinkweed	*Pterostylis nana*	Dwarf Greenhood
Pimelea humilus	Common Rice-flower	*Pterostylis nutans*	Nodding Greenhood
Platylobium obtusangulum	Common Flat-pea	*Pterostylis pedunculata*	Maroonhood
Pomaderris ferruginea	Rusty Pomaderris	*Thelymitra antennifera*	Rabbit-ears

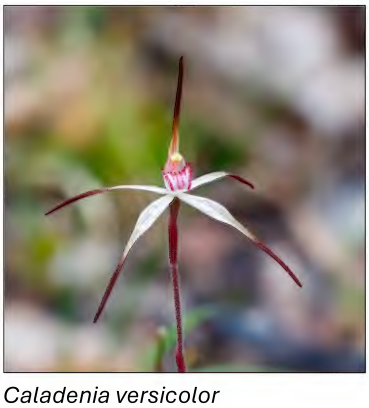
Weekend trip to Stawell

13–15 October

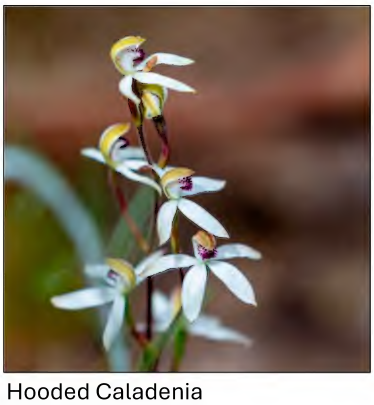
Kate Kirkhope, Jane Morrow and Bernie Lingham



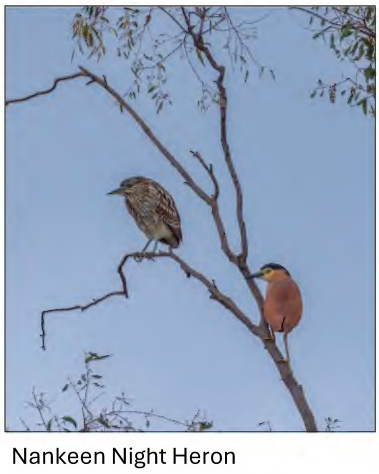
At Lake Lonsdale Photo: Alison Watson



Caladenia versicolor



Hooded Caladenia
Caladenia cucullata



Nankeen Night Heron
Photos: Graham Possingham

A wonderful weekend of wildflowers, birding and history was enjoyed by around 18 club members (depending on the comings and goings), on a cool but mostly fine weekend in October. Beginning on Friday afternoon, our first stop and meeting place was Big Hill above Stawell township, with a 360-degree view across the broader landscape. This was a great spot to get our bearings for the various sites we later visited.

We then travelled to the Stawell Gold Mine, which is still operating and has been upgraded after new ownership in 2017. Since that time the mine has flourished, working to depths of up to 1.6 km. Here is also the site of the Stawell Underground Physics Laboratory (SUPL), opened in 2022. The SUPL has been developed in conjunction with the new Centre of Excellence for Dark Matter Particle Physics. Located approximately one kilometre underground, it aims to facilitate an understanding of the formation of the universe from dark matter, one of the universe's biggest mysteries. The location and access were facilitated by the gold mine operators, given the uniquely suitable characteristics of a laboratory that far underground.

On Saturday morning we travelled to the Lake Lonsdale sandbar. After a few good rainfall seasons, the lake was still almost full which was a little disappointing as the sandbar was well underwater. That meant that the many and varied waders that commonly frequent the area were absent for our visit. However, we had a most enjoyable sunny walk along the beautiful sandy beach, where many small woodland birds inhabit the River Red-gums *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* on the water's edge. On our walk back over the dunes, many of the group were excited to see a vocal group of White-browed Babblers flitting amongst the banksias.

We then travelled on to Green Hole Reserve where we were surrounded by magnificent old River Red-gums at the Lake Lonsdale Dam outlet. A highlight here was a daytime roost of 30 Nankeen Night Heron. Further on, Devils Garden State Forest located on the south side of the Stawell-Halls Gap Road provided a beautiful open woodland with the prominent Violet Kunzea *Kunzea parvifolia* flowering profusely. Further highlights of the

afternoon were visits to Three Jacks Wildflower Sanctuary and Deep Lead Flora and Fauna Reserve. We were greeted by a dazzling array of wildflowers at these small but significant sites.

Three Jacks Wildflower Sanctuary, on the outskirts of Stawell township, is an important reserve which presented a wonderful variety of plant species, in an array of colours. One of the first plants to attract our attention was a flowering prostrate Guinea-flower *Hibbertia humifusa* ssp. *humifusa,* listed as Endangered under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988. The Sanctuary was the only location where we observed this species, but in other locations it was the widespread yellow-flowering shrub *Hibbertia australis* that we encountered. Also of particular interest at the Sanctuary were massed groupings of Fringed Everlasting *Chrysocephalum baxteri;* many Bush-peas *Pultenaea* including Matted Bush-pea *Pultenaea pedunculata;* a beautiful mauve Mintbush *Prostanthera* sp.*;* Slaty Sheoak *Allocasuarina muelleriana,* one tree which showed signs of Casuarina Gall *Cylindrococcus spiniferus*; and several flowering Hooded Caladenia orchids *Caladenia cucullata*.

On Sunday we had a fascinating exploration of the abandoned township of Heatherlie, located off the Mt Zero Road approximately 14 km north of Halls Gap. At its heart is Heatherlie sandstone quarry. The quarry supplied durable freestone from 1880 for the construction of Parliament House Melbourne and other significant buildings. It was closed in 1938, however machinery, buildings and railway infrastructure remain as evidence of the quarry's historic activity.

The area is densely vegetated with a variety of plants that we had not encountered over the preceding couple of days. Some of the more noteworthy plants we encountered included significant stands of the endemic and Endangered Grampians Heath Myrtle *Thryptomene calycina*—plants were in bud with a few just starting to flower*;* Thyme Spurge *Phyllanthus hirtellus;* Grampians bladderwort *Utricularia grampiana;* the delightful Blue Tinsel-Lily *Calectasia intermedia; and* one tiny Eastern Bronzehood Orchid *Caladenia transitoria*.

As lunchtime approached the weather began closing in and we went our separate ways. Thank you, Kate, for your expert organisation of this interesting and most enjoyable weekend.

Thanks to Graham Possingham for providing the bird lists:
Three Jacks Wildflower Sanctuary
Lake Lonsdale, the Green Hole
Heatherlie Quarry

References

Centre of Excellence for Dark Matter Particle Physics https://www.centredarkmatter.org/

Stawell Gold Mines Victoria Community Hub https:stawellgoldminescommunityhub.com.au/

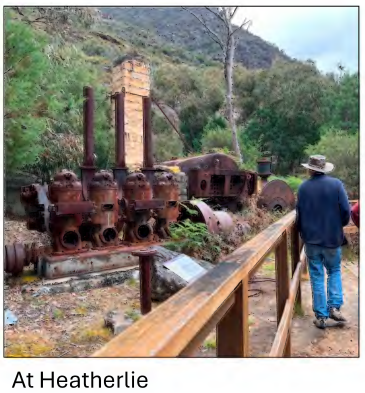
Stawell Underground Physics Laboratory https://www.supl.org.au/

Websites accessed November 2023.

Fringed Everlasting
Chrysocephalum baxteri

Hibbertia humifusa subsp. *humifusa*

Grampians Heath Myrtle
Thryptomene calycina
Photos: Bernie Lingham



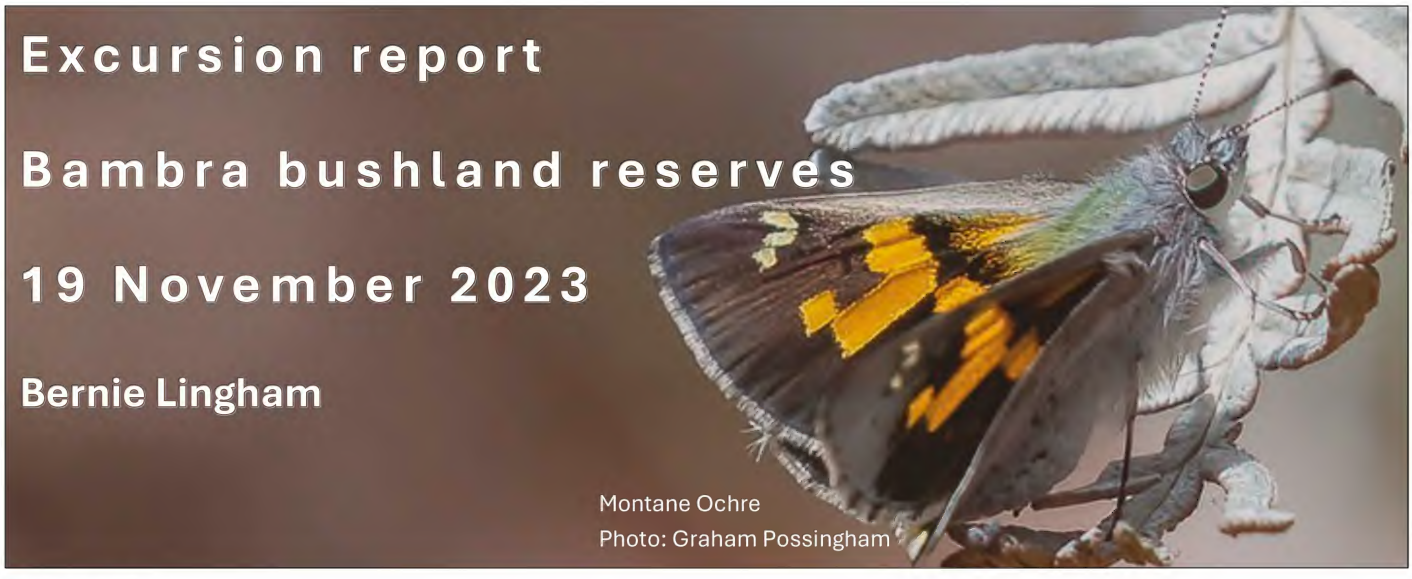
At Heatherlie
Photo: Jane Morrow

Excursion report

Bambra bushland reserves

19 November 2023

Bernie Lingham



Montane Ochre
Photo: Graham Possingham

Introduction

On this excursion we visited and explored two bushland reserves in the Bambra area (Surf Coast Shire):

Bambra Bushland Reserve, managed by Parks Victoria, located on the Bambra-Aireys Inlet Road.

An unnamed bush reserve (previously the Bambra Education Area) to the north of Bambra on the nearby Winchelsea-Deans Marsh Road. This reserve is part of the Otway Forest Park.

These reserves contain healthy Otway hinterland Lowland Forest habitat dominated by Messmates with a heathy understorey. Some older trees have well developed hollows. The GFNC Fauna Group has previously conducted surveys in the reserves and recorded a diverse range of birds, animals and vegetation. We were keen to explore the areas during the late spring-early summer period.

Bambra Bushland Reserve

To assist us to understand more about the history and management of the sites, members of the **East Otway Landcare Group (EOLG)** were invited to join us on the day. We were delighted to welcome Cara Johnson (President) and other group members to the morning component of the excursion.

Cara is a local artist and resident. She outlined the history, role and work of the EOLG, which had been formed more than 20 years ago. The primary focus of the group has been 'hands-on' through management of invasive weeds and rehabilitation of private land and local reserves using indigenous plantings for revegetation projects. In consultation with Parks Victoria as land manager, the ELOG have tackled and removed significant areas of weeds in the Reserve and rehabilitated the old tip (refuse) site. Cara noted that they aim to expand their activities and deepen their knowledge of local flora, fauna, and the ecological factors influencing local wildlife.

Our group of 17 set off along a walking trail which commenced from the south side of the Bambra-Aireys Inlet Road, opposite the Bambra tennis courts and hall. We spent an enjoyable morning following the trail on a loop walk to explore the area, recording the interesting birds and plants that we observed.

A tally of **36 bird species** was seen. Highlights included a flock of 21 Yellow-tailed Black-Cockatoos which flew overhead and a Pied Currawong feeding young on a nest.

While late spring-early summer is past the peak period to see flowering plants, many species were in bloom so we were not disappointed. Beneath the Messmates of the Reserve a range of flowering plants were noted, including Blue Pincushion *Brunonia australis*, Common Cassinia *Cassinia aculeata*, Chocolate Lily *Arthropodium strictum*, Black-anther Flax-lily *Dianella revoluta* var. *revoluta*, Small Grass-tree *Xanthorrhoea minor* ssp. *lutea,* Guinea Flower *Hibbertia* sp., Tea-tree *Leptospermum* sp., and a few Button Everlasting *Coronidium scorpiodes*. Many large patches of Common Bird Orchid *Chiloglottis valida* were present, but only a few spent flowers, significantly elongated in seed, were seen.

Unnamed reserve, Winchelsea-Deans Marsh Road.

Following lunch at the Bambra hall, we drove the short distance to another nearby reserve.

It was predictably quieter for birds given it was the middle of the day but we noted a **total count of 16 species.** A range of plants were in flower at this location, including Running Postman *Kennedia prostrata*, Smooth Parrot-pea *Dillwynia glaberrima*, Common Flat-*pea Platylobium obtusangulum*, Bent Goodenia *Goodenia geniculata* and many Bluebells *Wahlenbergia* spp.

The weather had warmed up and the increase in temperature, coupled with bright sunshine, encouraged invertebrate activity. Of particular interest were several sightings by the group of Forest Brown and Montane Ochre butterflies; Enamelled Spiders; Slender Ringtail Damselflies; and a small but fascinating moth in the Genus *Hestiochora* (in the Family of Burnet Moths).

The GFNC has set up an iNaturalist project entitled **Bambra Biodiversity** where you can find records of observations from the day, as well as records dating back several years. These two bushland reserves are well worth a visit at any time of the year. If you visit, remember to add your observations to the Project and help to build a comprehensive picture of the plants and animals of these areas.

We thank Cara and members of EOLG for their company and for sharing their passion and knowledge of the area with us. Thanks also to Chrissy for the bird lists; and to Graham and others for the plant and invertebrate records.

SEANA—what is that?

Diana Primrose

When I first joined the Geelong Field Naturalists Club in 1968, I was completely baffled by all these abbreviations ('acronyms' we call them today—my father's 1961 'Concise English Dictionary of Common Language' doesn't even list the word)! There was GFNC of course (easy enough), but what about WVFNCA, FNCV, VFNCA?

WVFNCA was Western Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association, FNCV was Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (as it is today—the 'Melbourne' Club), and VFNCA was Victorian Field Naturalists Clubs Association. There seemed to be an invisible dividing line—Clubs to the East of Melbourne, and Clubs to the West. Why was this so, one might ask?

I would suggest 'communication'. Back in the 1960s many communications were handwritten or perhaps typed on a typewriter (with any errors being 'whited-out' and typed over), and perhaps there was access to a Roneo machine (I think they were called) which copied the typed and 'whited-out' masterpiece. The ink seemed to have a pinkish hue and faded with time. Long distance telephone calls were reasonably expensive, often had to be 'lodged' and were not undertaken lightly. Even when I became Treasurer and Membership Officer in 1981, I was handed a ledger book with members' names and details carefully handwritten. I got really 'modern' and laboriously changed this to a card system—with some help from Rolf Baldwin I recall! Quite a slow job as we had about 500 members in those days (including Juniors, with a family membership counted as 'two').

Years passed by and communications became so much easier—we can now look at the palm of our hand. Why have an East and West group planning campouts in their own areas—why not combine all the field naturalist clubs of Victoria under one big Club or Association, and call it the South East Australian Field Naturalists Clubs Association—(SEANA), which was done in 2004.

So SEANA is an 'Association' of Clubs—individual Victorian Clubs (and Clubs 'just over the border') are invited to join SEANA. Individual members of these Clubs are covered during SEANA camps for all sorts of serious things like insurance. Anyone from further afield or not a member of an existing Club is welcome to join SEANA campouts but must pay a small 'individual membership' fee, to cover insurance.

Having attended many WVFNCA, and now SEANA campouts over the years, it is really encouraging to see how SEANA is thriving. 120 plus members from 18 different Clubs from all over Victoria met over the

(extended) weekend of 20–23 October this year. It was jointly hosted by Sale and District Field Naturalists Club Inc. and Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Club Inc. It was a wonderful opportunity to see and learn what other Clubs are doing, be taken to their local favourite birding and plant spots, hear informative speakers, enjoy great camaraderie—with well catered for evening meals, and interesting speakers. Attendees arrange their own accommodation using a helpful guide from the hosting club/s (camping areas, hotels, motels, etc. in the vicinity).

SEANA campouts are a wonderful way to learn about natural history sites away from our own locality and hear from local experts. An appreciation of natural history is all that is necessary to enjoy, and learn, from a SEANA campout. I would encourage some GFNC members who have never attended—to give it a try! You won't regret it!

SEANA camp Yarram October 2023

Alison Watson, Diana Primrose, Deborah Evans

The spring camp for the South East Australian Naturalists' Association was hosted jointly by Sale and District and Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists Clubs from 20–23 October attended by a smaller than usual number of GFNC members.

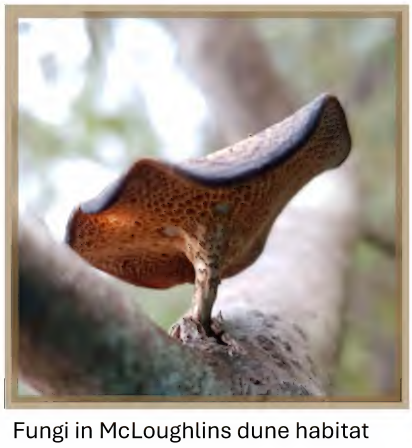
Alison Watson

Highlights included exploring Mullungdung State Forest and learning about the various eucalypts—Yellow Stringybark, Silvertop Ash, Mountain Grey gum and Grey Box. We found a number of orchids, though it was not a good year for them. A Red-bellied Black Snake lying across the track caused us to stop, but unfortunately it had been hit. We walked through seventy-year-old unburnt coastal heath to get to McLoughlins Beach, which is the western end of the Ninety-mile beach. The habitat was impressive and included Hornet or Tiger Orchid, *Diuris sulphurea,* flowering amongst the vegetation. We discussed the benefits of not burning, that the biomass builds up and plants naturally die leaving open areas for other plants such as orchids to appear.

The forecast wild weather conditions meant some excursions were cancelled, which was disappointing for some. We missed out on the Tarra-Bulga trip but saw and heard about it from those who had attended the day before. They were very impressed with the beautiful Beech Orange Fungi which not many people have seen. On the windy Sunday it was a chance to explore Port Albert and the extensive mangroves. Others were fortunate to see godwits and Eastern Curlews at the Toora bird-hide further along the coast.

The talks in the evening were informative—Mitch Smith's entertaining talk 'Sex Lies and Photographs—a story of orchid

Tiger Orchid *Diuris sulphurea*



Fungi in McLoughlins dune habitat
Photos: Alison Watson

pollination research around the Yarram area' had everyone engrossed and his photos of insects were stunning—the result of extensive research and hours of patient observation. We also heard about a new book *Eucalypts of the Strzelecki Ranges* by Jenny Wolswinkel, the walking trails of Yarram and District, and a presentation titled 'Tarra Bulga—its history and flora and fauna'.

Diana Primrose

Excursion to Toora and Foster areas

This excursion was led by Rohan Bugg, once a Geelong FNC member. A very knowledgeable field naturalist, and as entertaining as ever!

We started by driving to Toora and a visit to the excellent bird hide which overlooks a little inlet off the larger Corner Inlet. The species visible at the time we called were largely a flock of Bar-tailed Godwits, with random others joining in—two Caspian Terns, two Pied Oyster Catchers, a Red-necked Stint, two Great Knots and a Forest Raven being most prominent.

We then drove on to Foster to a couple of Rohan's favourite bird and plant spots—chasing in particular the Scarlet Honeyeater—many calls were heard and at least one spotted. We paused for a nice long lunch, and plenty of discussion, in a little park in Foster—a very nice little country town. Rohan introduced us to two bushland reserves, including Cody Gully, identifying plants and birds along the way. Common Bird Orchids, Bronze Caladenia, Tasman Flax Lily, *Melaleuca squarossa*, Cherry Ballart, Pouched Coral Fern, Tufted Grass Lily, *Xanthorea minor*, an interesting double-petalled bauera, in a largely Long-leafed Peppermint and Messmate forest. Birds included Scarlet Honeyeater, Fantail Cuckoo, Shining Bronze-Cuckoo, Rufous and Golden Whistlers.

Alberton Cemetery—plants & local history.

This excursion was led by Lorraine Norden who described it as a 'slow wander through one of Victoria's oldest cemeteries which is a site of botanical significance containing remnant native grassland'.

Despite a cold southerly bluster nearly blowing us off our feet we were treated to some very nice wildflower meadows. The cemetery caretakers have cooperated with local field naturalists and refrained from mowing certain areas, leaving large areas of native grassland with swathes of indigenous plants in flower—pink, white, blue, yellow—Trigger plants *Stylidium* spp. and Rice flower *Pimelia* spp.

Deborah Evans

Having had my planned boat trip cancelled by the wild weather, I spent Saturday at Tarra-Bulga National Park enjoying the magnificent mountain forest and fern gully scenery, contrasting this on Sunday with the drier lowland forest of Alberton West State Forest No. 1 with its orchids and open lower storey.

The camp organising team had provided excellent self-guided excursion notes which my carload used on the return trip home on Monday. Agnes Falls was a raging torrent after the weekend's rain and the Toora Bird Hide came up trumps with over 40 Eastern Curlews—great excitement to sit and watch these now critically endangered birds.

It was another enjoyable camp exploring a new area with fellow naturalists from across the state. Catered for by the Yarram Country Club we were well looked after with excellent meals. Thank you to Sale and District FNC and Latrobe Valley FNC for a great weekend.

The next SEANA camp will be from 19–22 April 2024 at Phillip Island.

Tarra-Bulga NP

Agnes Falls

Eastern Curlews from Toora bird hide
Photos: Deborah Evans

Fauna survey report

Lilydale, Batesford

12 August–9 September 2023

Barry Lingham

Introduction

This survey involved the placement of five motion detection cameras on 12 August and camera retrieval on 9 September. The target species for camera detection were both arboreal and terrestrial mammals.

Lilydale is situated in the Moorabool River valley downstream from Batesford. Many large old Yellow Gums are present, along with scattered Golden Wattles and Drooping Sheoak. Closer to the river, River Red-gums dominate. Granite outcrops are prominent across the property and soils are composed of granitic sands. Large parts of the property have infestations of African Boneseed and Kunzea, but indigenous plants are present in some sections.

Weather

The five-week period was typical of variable early spring conditions, with a range of daytime temperatures, many overcast days and some sunny breaks. It rained on several days but with no heavy falls.

Method

Motion camera detection

Five Reconyx HF2X cameras were deployed. Each was focused upon a steel bait station containing bait consisting of peanut butter and rolled oats, with some golden syrup and molasses. A small amount of palm oil was added to help stop rain from deteriorating the bait.

Cameras were organised as follows:

- two cameras were focused upon bait attached to the trunks of large Yellow Gums at a height around 1.2 m
- one was focused on a pole with bait attached at 1.2 m amid Kunzea scrub
- one was located at ground level among rocks on a small hill
- one was positioned at ground level in rocks near the Moorabool River.

Cameras were set to take two or three images and a 10 second video after each movement detection.

Results

A total of 1222 photos or videos were taken by the cameras, of which over 350 showed fauna. Windy conditions gave false triggers for many images and passing Black Wallabies were recorded more than 250 times.

Table 1 provides a list of fauna recorded by camera location.

	Bait location (height above ground cm)				
	In Kunzea (120 cm)	Yellow Gum (105 cm)	Amid rocks (10 cm)	Yellow Gum (120 cm)	Rocks near river bank (0 cm)
Species	**Camera 1**	**Camera 2**	**Camera 3**	**Camera 4**	**Camera 5**
House Mouse			✓		✓
Black Wallaby	✓	✓			
Common Brushtail Possum					✓
Short-beaked Echidna		✓	✓		
European Rabbit	✓		✓		
Domestic Dog					✓
Birds				✓	✓
Reptiles					✓

Table 1: Fauna recorded by camera location

Comments on fauna detected:

- **Common Brushtail Possums** *Trichosurus vulpecula* were only detected by the camera near the river
- **Black Wallabies** *Wallabia bicolor* were active both day and night. Initially, they spent time sniffing around the bait, but did not bother after the first week
- **Short-beaked Echidna** *Tachyglossus aculeatus* was/were recorded both during daytime and late at night
- a few **House Mice** *Mus musculus* were detected at ground level
- a **Southern Water Skink** *Elamprus tympanum* was detected moving about near the river. We may attempt more reptile detections via the cameras in future
- Bird species detected on camera were Grey Shrikethrush, White-browed Scrubwren, Superb Fairywren, and New Holland Honeyeater.

Unusually for a location close to urban areas, **Black Rats** *Rattus rattus* were not detected.

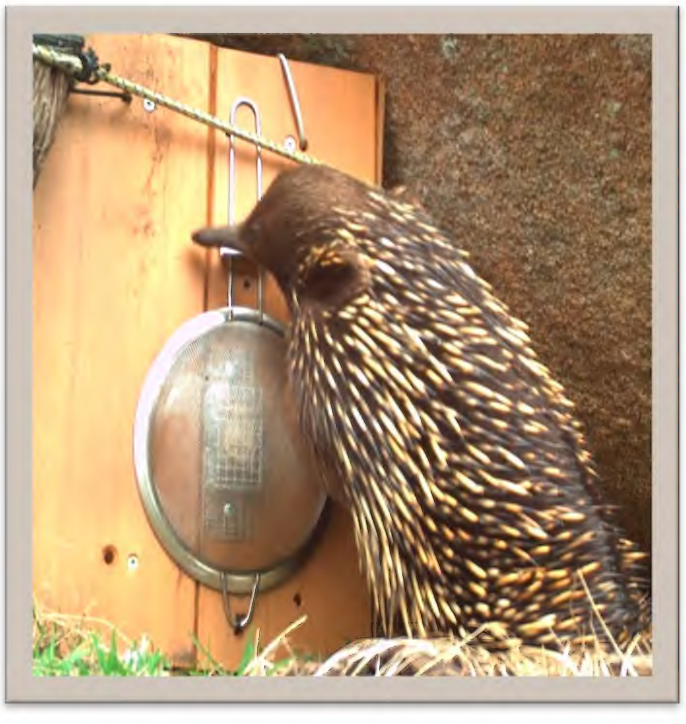
During our initial visit to set-up cameras on 12 August, five Swift Parrots were seen in Yellow Gums. This is a significant sighting of these endangered birds. Other species of note seen that day included a Little Eagle, eight Honeyeater species and Spotted Pardalotes nesting in a burrow. Chrissy Freestone and George Appleby compiled a **bird survey** of the site with 33 species recorded. On 9 September another **bird survey** was carried out with 32 species recorded. Spotted Pardalotes were again observed, nesting in a burrow in a different location.

Thanks

The *Lilydale* remnant bushland zone is vital to maintaining biodiversity in the region. Current owners of the property are the Roydhouse family. We greatly appreciate their support, including granting the GFNC permission to undertake the recent survey on their property—continuing a connection between the GFNC and *Lilydale* that stretches over 130 years.

Thanks all who took part in setting, checking and collecting the cameras; contributing to the bird list; and listing records of the fauna observed on iNaturalist.

Permits: the fauna survey was carried out under the conditions set out in WSIAEC project approval 38.21, DELWP permit 10010270 and SPFL no. 20072.



Short-beaked Echidna checking out a bait station, 12/09/23
Photo: Camera 3

Fauna Group members collecting cameras at *Lilydale*, 12/09/23
Photo: Bernie Lingham

About the GFNC, Dog Rocks and *Lilydale* connection

Members of the GFNC have been visiting the Dog Rocks area since the initial inception of the club in the 1880s. Along with its relatively close proximity to Geelong, the granitic geology and unusual flora and birdlife of this area have always made it a popular destination.

Thomas Sergeant Hall, scientist and prominent naturalist, writes in *The Wombat* (1897 p.10),

It is here then that the Dog Rocks affords a field on which it would be well to concentrate all the forces at the disposal of the Club. It is so near at hand that it can be visited again and again at all seasons of the year; its area is small and its differences from the surrounding country are striking. Now would it be possible for a "Dog Rocks Natural History Committee" to be formed to take the subject up? Work can be found among birds, reptiles, insects and plants. Perhaps some of the smaller marsupials may be found which have been killed off elsewhere in the neighbourhood.

Map 1 *Lilydale* and Batesford reserves (modified from Batesford Fyansford Stonehaven Landcare Group **website**)

Bird watching has always been very popular in the Dog Rocks area and after *Lilydale* was purchased by the Belcher family in 1891, excursions to the property were made by the GFNC and the Bird Observers Club. Charles Belcher, nephew of the owner of *Lilydale*, recorded many species of birds from the property in his book *Birds of Geelong* published in 1914. A 1967 bird census carried out by the GFNC recorded a total of 130 species at Lilydale and in the Batesford district, including 51 resident species, 46 occasional visitors, 23 migrants and 10 rare species. Rob Ganly from the GFNC conducted 48 bird surveys at *Lilydale* and nearby sites over many years up until 2009, with a total of 149 bird species observed (Hewish 2009 p. 12).

In 2006, then owners George and Lit Belcher placed a Trust For Nature conservation covenant on their approx. 81 ha *Lilydale* property, creating the Dog Rocks Flora and Fauna Sanctuary in perpetuity. It complemented the Dog Rocks Reserve created by Bill Honey (GFNC member) and his family which includes the outcrop of granite rocks opposite *Lilydale*.

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Hall, T. S. (1897) 'The Dog Rocks', *The Wombat*, vol. III, no. 1, pp. 10–11.

Hewish, D. (2009) 'Batesford and its birds from 1838 to 2009—Rob Ganly. Bird Group Meeting, 19 November 2009', *Geelong Naturalist*, vol. 45, no. 8, pp. 12–13.

Fauna survey report

Private property, Gerangamete

23 September–9 October 2023

Barry Lingham

Introduction

The GFNC Fauna Group had previously conducted a survey at this property located at Pipeline Road, Gerangamete in December 2017. The farming property of approximately 150 ha runs cattle and sheep on the rich soils along the valley of Porcupine Creek that passes through the site. The Great Otway National Park is adjacent to the western boundary. Annual rainfall in the area is almost twice that received by Geelong, and the property encloses approximately 25 ha of wet forest, with thick stands of Broom Tea-tree *Leptospermum scoparium* adjacent to Porcupine Creek.

A wide range of Eucalypts grow in the forested area including Swamp Gum *Eucalyptus ovata,* Narrow-leaved Peppermint *E. radiata* ssp. *radiata* and Messmate Stringybark *E. obliqua*. In some wet zones, Manna Gum *E. viminalis* was dominant above extensive thickets of Pricky Currant-bush *Coprosma quadrifida*. Some elevated zones contained many excellent specimens of tall, hollow-bearing Scent-bark *E. aromaphloia*. An old, large spreading Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon,* with moss covered logs beneath, was the location where Bush Rats were most active.

Understorey plants we noted included Scrambling Coral-fern *Gleichenia microphylla,* Red-fruit Saw-sedge *Gahnia sieberiana* and several Sword-sedge *Lepidosperma* species.

The 2017 GFNC survey detected both Agile and Dusky Antechinus and four species of bats (Pescott 2017). Recently, the Wild Otways project used motion detection cameras to record feral pigs at the property. As well as pigs, some cameras showed photographs of potoroos (Drake pers. comm.). The wet forest seemed suitable habitat for the Long-nosed Potoroos (Homan 2023). These observations enticed the GFNC to undertake further surveying with a focus on detecting potoroos, plus Long-nosed Bandicoots that had also been seen in the area.

Weather

The three-week period included some cooler conditions and a range of daytime temperatures. Many days were overcast with some showers but no heavy falls.

Method

1. Motion camera detection

Five Reconyx HF2X cameras were deployed. Each was focused upon a steel bait station containing standard bait consisting of peanut butter and rolled oats with some golden syrup and molasses. A small amount of palm oil was added to help stop rain from deteriorating the bait.

The survey was focused upon detection of terrestrial fauna so baits were set close to the ground within a range from 0–40 cm. The bait sites were all located close to the boundary between wetter habitat and the elevated drier zones.

Old Blackwood Tree

Checking traps

Photos: Alison Watson

Results from the cameras

	Bait location (height above ground cm)				
	Edge of Tea-tree (20 cm)	Blackwood area (0)	Messmate woodland (40 cm)	Messmate woodland (120 cm)	Manna Gum wetter zone (0)
Species	**Camera 1**	**Camera 2**	**Camera 3**	**Camera 4**	**Camera 5**
Long-nosed Potoroo	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black Wallaby	✓				✓
Eastern Grey Kangaroo			✓		✓
Common Brushtail Possum					✓
Koala			✓		
Short-beaked Echidna	✓	✓			
Bush Rat	✓	✓			
Birds	✓	✓	✓	✓	

2. Elliot traps

Traps were set in the general vicinity of the five camera detection sites, following the biome between the wetter teatree dominated zones and drier elevated areas. A total of 39 traps in four trap lines were set, over three nights (117 trap nights). The standard bait was used.

Results from the traps

7/10/2023: no animals.

8/10/2023: Bush Rat–3 caught. Weights 116 gm, 111 gm and 128 gm.

9/10/2023: Bush Rat–2 caught. Weight 121 gm; one not weighed.

Overall comments on mammalian fauna detected:

Long-nosed Potoroos *Potorous tridactylus* were detected on camera at four sites. Variations in size and tail markings confirmed that more than one individual was present at some camera sites, suggesting an overlap of individual ranges. The potoroos were mostly observed foraging in the leaf litter or passing through and they appeared to pay scant attention to the bait stations. They were active at all times of day and night. One small individual was noted at 1.30 p.m., only 90 minutes after the camera was originally set up.

Black Wallabies *Wallabia bicolor* were active both day and night. They actively spent time sniffing around the bait.

Eastern Grey Kangaroos *Macropus giganteus* were detected passing the cameras but were not attracted by the baits.

One **Common Brushtail Possum** *Trichosurus vulpecula* was detected and spent some time checking the bait.

One **Common Ringtail Possum** *Pseudocheirus peregrinus* was seen in a tree during spotlighting. It was the only animal detected during several hours of night surveys.

One **Koala** *Phascolarctos cinereus* was detected passing Camera 3. It did not check the bait station. Several Koalas were seen in Manna Gums during our visit.

The **Short-beaked Echidnas** *Tachyglossus aculeatus* were detected at two sites, between 10.30 p.m.–12.00 a.m.

Bush Rats *Rattus fuscipes* were detected on cameras in the same general areas where five were captured in the Elliot traps. During one night, an Elliot trap was set up in view of Camera 1. The Bush Rat was photographed sniffing at the trap opening but it did not enter the trap. We may learn more about how animals interact with our traps by using cameras to monitor the traps.

Comments on the avifauna

Bird species detected on camera were Superb Fairywren, White-browed Scrubwren, Bassian Thrush and Common Blackbird. Bassian Thrushes were mostly detected in the period just before sunrise.

George Appleby was challenged by the survey participants to try and observe more than 50 species at the property over the three days of the survey—he surprised us all with a final tally of over 80 species. Highlights included a Painted

Buttonquail, Blue-winged Parrots, three species of Whistlers, five raptor species, many White-necked Herons and several Jacky Winters. The **eBird observation list** of the site was compiled by George and Chrissy Freestone.

Reptiles noted

A McCoy's Skink (also known as the Highlands Forest-skink) *Anepischetosia maccoyi* was found under a log. This small skink with short legs is only found in wetter habitats.

Invertebrates noted

A bright yellow flatworm with four dark stripes was found under a piece of timber. The species is not yet determined, but it may be Hoggs Flatworm *Caenoplana hoggii*.

Thanks

Margie Drake welcomed us to the property and extended her hospitality to include access to her home and food (home grown beef fillet!). She is very interested in the flora and fauna on the farm and attended the trap checking as well as providing us with lots of information and stories about the farm during our extensive evening conversations. Many thanks Margie—we will return in 2024 to follow up on your invitation to visit again.

Thanks to everyone who assisted in setting the cameras and helped with the trapping and camera survey.

Permits: the fauna survey was carried out under the conditions set out in WSIAEC project approval 38.21, DELWP permit 10010270 and SPFL no. 20072.

References

Homan, P. (2023) 'Long-nosed Potoroos in the Otway Ranges', *Geelong Naturalist*, September 2023.

Pescott, T. (2018) 'Gerangamete fauna survey. 7–10 December 2017', *Geelong Naturalist*, February 2018.

The Geelong Birding Trails Project

Margaret Alcorn

A birding trail is a collection of birding hotspots and walks in a local area that can be reasonably visited in a day. This project aims to create a series of birding trail guides to assist the local community and visitors to find the best bird birding locations in the region. The guides have been created by GFNC club members.

Each guide includes a map of the bird walk locations along with details such as parking, walking distance, facilities and the birds to expect.

The Geelong region has a diverse range of habitats including wet forests, heathlands, dry woodlands, beaches, and riverine wetlands resulting in a rich bird life. To date, 342 bird species have been recorded in eBird for City of Greater Geelong alone.

Two birding trail guides have been prepared thus far, covering the areas around Barwon Heads and Ocean Grove, and Point Lonsdale and Queenscliff.

Click on the links below to access each guide. They are also available on the club website.

Fauna observation highlights

September–November

Barry Lingham

Observations are sourced from the **GFNC Fauna Collection** project on iNaturalist or the **GFNC Observations page.** This report lists selected observations recorded during spring of unusual species, species out of normal range or those exhibiting interesting behaviour.

MAMMAL SPECIES	GENERAL COMMENTS ON OBSERVATIONS
Platypus Barwon River above Baums Weir; Barwon River west of Ring Road; Barwon River near Red Gum Island; Moorabool River Reserve, Batesford	Regular reports received of Platypuses in the Barwon River upstream from Queens Park bridge to west of the Geelong Ring Road. An early morning walk is a good time to spot them, or paddle a kayak upstream from Baums Weir. Up to 3 seen at the Moorabool River Reserve.
Short-beaked Echidna Eclipse Creek, Meredith; Taits Point, Lake Connewarre	Echidnas seem to be very active during spring. Observations help in mapping the range of local populations.
Swamp Antechinus Aireys Inlet	Several detected. Populations of this Vulnerable (Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988) species are limited and fragmented within the Otway region.
Long-nosed Bandicoot Bambra	Reports received of road killed animals. Long-nosed Bandicoots are found in the wetter parts of the Otways.
Koala Yankee Gully near Steiglitz; Moorabool River Reserve; Yaugher, Otway Forest Park	Records of Koalas help in mapping the range of local populations.
Greater Glider Wombat State Forest	Wombat State Forest is the closest zone to Geelong where this endangered species is found.
Long-nosed Potoroo Gerangamete	Several were recorded on cameras during the GFNC fauna survey in October. They are found in the wetter zones of the Otways.
Black (Swamp) Wallaby Barwon River, upstream of Ring Road; Inverleigh Nature Conservation Reserve; Moreep Bushland Reserve; Ocean Grove Nature Reserve (OGNR); Corio	Populations of this wallaby species are found in many reserves; they move along river corridors and sometimes appear near or within urban Geelong. Some populations (such as at the OGNR) have become self-sustaining following release of animals in the past.
Grey-headed Flying-fox Queens Park, Geelong	Many thousands of this species leave their roost in Eastern Park on dusk. Records of this species help to establish where they go and how far they travel each night.
Lesser Long-eared Bat You Yangs	This species is distinguished by the Y-shaped groove in the nostrils and long ears. They are reasonably common in the Geelong area.
Fallow Deer Hospital Swamp	Group of 3 seen. Some population control of the species has been undertaken within the Lake Connewarre Wildlife Reserve.

FROG SPECIES	GENERAL COMMENTS ON OBSERVATIONS
Southern Brown Tree Frog Portarlington	A widespread species with a distinctive call.
Growling Grass Frog Portarlington area	This large frog is listed as Vulnerable (FFGA 1988). Note that it is sometimes called the Southern Bell Frog and that the scientific name changed from *Litoria raniformis* to *Ranoidea raniformis*.
Eastern Banjo Frog Portarlington; Buckley Park near Ocean Grove; Batesford	Widespread reports of this species. They are more active after rain and may be seen moving over land on wet nights.
Spotted Marsh (Grass) Frog Jerringot Wetland; Portarlington	A widespread species more often heard than seen.

REPTILE SPECIES	GENERAL COMMENTS ON OBSERVATIONS
Eastern Snake-necked Turtle Deakin University, Waurn Ponds	Observer alerted by loud calls from New Holland Honeyeaters and Red Wattlebirds as the turtle emerged from a pond.
Macquarie Turtle Balyang Sanctuary, Geelong	Sunning on a log beneath a tree. The species is native to northern Victoria but introduced populations have spread into the Barwon and other southern Victorian rivers.
Eastern Three-lined Skink Anglesea	Photographed with a large spider in its mouth. Skinks eat a wide range of invertebrates.
McCoy's Skink (Highlands Forest-Skink) Gerangamete	Found under a piece of wood during the GFNC fauna survey in October. The species is associated with wetter areas of the Otways.
Blotched Bluetongue Reports from across the region	The warmer spring weather has seen many Blotched Bluetongues becoming active. Mating occurs during October–November. They tend to prefer slightly cooler habitat than Common Bluetongues, but their ranges overlap.
Shingleback Lizard You Yangs	The isolated population of this species at the You Yangs may have originated from the release of unwanted pets.
Common Bluetongue Highton; Geelong; Gherang	Normally, Common Bluetongues have a series of bands around the body. However, two recent observations were of melanistic individuals with completely dark bodies.
Glossy Grass Skink Geelong area	This attractive skink is usually found near water. It has recently been listed as a Vulnerable (FFGA 1988) species in Victoria.
Jacky Dragon Thirteenth Beach; Edwards Point Wildlife Reserve	Both records are from coastal sand dune habitat but this dragon lizard is found in a range of local bushland habitats.
Lowland Copperhead Hospital Swamps	Snake moved from walking track into grassed area.
White-lipped Snake Harrisons Track, Anglesea	Observed sunning on a track. This small snake is not often seen.
Little Whip Snake Avalon Coastal Reserve	A dead specimen.
Eastern Brown Snake You Yangs; Anakie Gorge	One observation was of a snake near a waterhole. The other observation was a snake drinking at a waterhole.

Above: Eastern Three-lined Skink *Acritoscincus duperreyi*, Anglesea 14/10/23
Photo: John Newman

Left: Glossy Grass Skink *Pseudemoia rawlinsoni,* Geelong area October 2023
Photo: Christine Jackson

Butterfly observations summary September–November

Valda Dedman

There have been hundreds of butterfly observations recorded over the past three months, both on the **GFNC webpage** and in **iNaturalist**. This report presents my attempt to summarise them.

Australian Painted Lady
The first of this migratory species was seen on 2 September at Inverleigh and the last (for this reporting period) on 25 November at Anglesea. They have been recorded throughout the Geelong district, with many observed around Anglesea but also right in the centre of Geelong.

Blotched Dusky Blue
Two were recorded, both at Anglesea, one on 3 September and one on 17 September.

Broad-margined Azure
One was seen at Little River on 5 November.

Cabbage White
At least 20 were recorded but there were probably many many more flying around. This species is very common in the suburbs in mid-November.

Caper White
Eight were recorded, with the first on 1 October and the last on 8 November. They have been seen to the north of Geelong, at Flinders Peak in the You Yangs, and in Drysdale, Queenscliff and Lavers Hill to the south. A very small migration this year.

Chequered Copper
Two pairs were seen at 5.30 p.m. on 19 October at Drewan Park, Wandana Heights.

Common Brown
The first was seen on 27 October at Long Forest. Since then, there have been many sightings, including 50 at Flinders Peak on 5 November, which included one early female. Another female was seen at Highton on 25 November.

Common Grass-blue
On 1 October two were seen in heathy woodland at the Inverleigh Nature Conservation Reserve. On 7 November two were seen in roadside grasses at Armstrong Creek. Others have been seen at Queenscliff, Ocean Grove, Bells Beach, Anglesea and Norlane.

Forest Brown
Two were spotted on the GFNC excursion to Bambra on 19 November. Others were seen at Aireys Inlet and Lorne.

Green Grass-dart
There were 23 records for this species from a variety of locations, including Bacchus Marsh, Bellarine Peninsula, Mt. Duneed, Anglesea, Belmont, Highton and also at the Geelong Botanic Gardens.

Heath Sand-skipper
Two separate sightings were recorded at Anglesea on 14 October.

Imperial Jezebel
Many records were submitted across the three-month reporting period and from many areas, including the Brisbane Ranges and around Anglesea. One was seen flying in full sunshine in heathy woodland at Forest Road, Anglesea on 3 September; one at Black Rocks on 12 September; several were seen in East Geelong.

Spotted Jezebel
One was recorded at Gherang on 10 October; one on 5 November flying around the lookout at Flinders Peak at the You Yangs.

Meadow Argus
Four were seen in Belmont on 23 September and one in East Geelong on 17 November.

Montane Ochre
A surprising number of observations have been recorded. Three were seen at Bambra during the GFNC excursion on 19 November. Many have been seen around Anglesea and they have been noted at Steiglitz and further north.

Rayed Blue
At least six were recorded as being scattered along the track and at the summit of Flinders Peak at the You Yangs on 5 November. Others were also recorded at Rowsley and Balliang.

Saltbush Blue
Two were seen at Jerringot on a new patch of *Rhagodia* sp. on 25 November. Earlier in the month others were seen at Lake Connewarre and at Jan Juc.

Silky Hairstreak
There have been five records for this species, with the first seen on 12 September. They have been seen in Anglesea, Barongarook (two records), Ballan and Lal Lal.

Two-spotted Line-blue
This species has been seen at Inverleigh, Teesdale, Mt. Duneed, East Geelong—with the first observation date 29 September and the last 25 November.

Varied Dusky-blue
On 3 September two pairs were observed in woody heath along Forest Road Anglesea; three in Anglesea heathland on 14 October. This species has also been seen at Long Forest, Lerderderg, Balliang and Steiglitz.

Varied Sedge-Skipper
Just two records: one at Anglesea in very low heath on 14 October and one at Wallington on 8 November.

Varied Sword-grass Brown
Again, just two records, both from the far west Otway coast.

White-banded Grass-dart
On 23 September 10 or more were seen in the grassland at Seaview Park, Belmont—a very early record. On 23 October the species was recorded at Little River and on the 28 October at Mannerim. On 18 November it was recorded at Fairhaven and two were at Jerringot on 25 November.

Yellow Admiral
There are many records for this common species. It was first recorded on 3 September at Lake Lonsdale and has turned up all over the Geelong district. The latest sighting was at Wallington on 17 November.

Challenge Bird Count December 2023

John Newman and David Tytherleigh

After a week of challenging easterlies and rain, Sunday 3 December saw a still and rain-free 6 a.m. start at Point Addis carpark for the three participants of this year's Surfcoast/Bellarine Peninsula Challenge Bird Count. Quiet seas and surrounding coastal scrub led to plenty of bird action in Ironbark Basin where Jeff's **Powerful Owl** complete with Ringtail Possum in its talons was eventually voted bird of the day. The productive roadsides of Flaxbournes and Nortons Roads cemented their popularity among birders, and the surrounding farmland gave views of **Brown Songlark** and cover for many calling **Stubble Quail**. On through to Point Impossible and Breamlea where Barry joined us as member number four for the afternoon, adding species regularly through the saltmarsh and ponds. Lake Connewarre and Hospital Swamp were rich in waterfowl including fourteen **Great Crested Grebe** in glorious plumage and **Pink-eared Ducks**.

Blue Rocks had a small number of shorebirds including four **Pacific Golden-Plovers** but with the very high tide Barwon Estuary was quiet. Freshwater Lake was awash with ducks including **Blue-billed Ducks** and Lake Victoria similarly waterfowl laden and gave good numbers of **Banded Stilt**, **Pied Stilt** and **Red-necked Avocets**. The Pt Lonsdale Lighthouse was a wild and relatively bird free stop before a decision was made to bypass Swan Bay and Lake Lorne and head straight to Reedy Lake in Moolap with time getting away from us. The exceedingly richly vegetated lake edge made getting a vantage point difficult but a juvenile **Fan-tailed Cuckoo** being fed by **White-browed Scrubwrens** was a highlight. A roadside stop at Moolap Saltworks added several more shorebirds including **Marsh Sandpiper** and Eastern Park was a fitting close to a full but most enjoyable day. 137 species for the day was satisfying and no doubt reflects our many healthy wetlands and woodlands thriving after rain.

At Blue Rocks
Photo: John Newman

Bird observation highlights September–November

John Newman and Craig Morley

Spring is a time of much anticipation in bird observing circles. It heralds the arrival of more bird species into our area, many birds with breeding on their agenda in our milder climate with good food reserves. Plenty of water in wetlands and warming, lengthening days means more insect life, more small reptiles, more grasses in seed. One year to the next, it is a topic of much expectation—will we see Woodswallows and Trillers again this season, will the spring skies be filled with Songlark melodies, which waders will we see return this year, what will we see breeding locally? Many of these arrivals are weather and season dependent and with the arrival of warm, northerly spring winds and an approaching El Niño, we can happily now report that most of these anticipated arrivals have indeed eventuated.

Studying the GFNC Bird Observations list which allows observers to report any interesting sightings or behaviours, we can see that ten diurnal raptor species and three owl species have been reported. Our majestic **Wedge-tailed Eagle**, well up there as one of the largest eagles in the world by wingspan, has been seen over the city centre at the Geelong Botanic Gardens and the suburbs such as Newtown, as well as at Lake Connewarre and near the Barwon River in Ceres close to where they have been known to nest. The similarly sized and equally imposing **White-bellied Sea-Eagle** was noted as a pair in the Lake Connewarre area.

A light-morph **Little Eagle** at Corio was a treat as was a nearby **Spotted Harrier** patrolling the crops towards the You Yangs. A **Square-tailed Kite** in Highton was a major find and most unusual, with two sightings over several days. **Australian Hobbies** have been widespread as have **Collared Sparrowhawk** with several pairs in urban/suburban Geelong. **Black-shouldered Kites,** including breeding birds with young, have been seen widely as have **Nankeen Kestrels**.

A **Powerful Owl** record from Meredith was a great record from a location we don't often hear about as were a series of records of **Southern Boobook** from Wombat State Forest. A ghostly white **Barn Owl** in headlights on a roadside at Armstrong Creek reminded the observer of the risks our night birds take looking for food.

The anticipation of spring arrivals has been well documented in the Club observation records. The mallee-woodland of Long Forest near Bacchus Marsh has been a hotspot of wonderful spring migrants recently including **Western Gerygone** and **Scarlet Honeyeater**.

Records of **Red-capped Robins** and the hard-to-find resident **Speckled Warbler** are always a treat as was a **Jacky Winter**. A second male **Red-capped Robin** for our region at the eastern side of the You Yangs was unexpected and very vocal. Both **Rufous Songlark** and **Brown Songlark** have been seen, the former most unexpectedly in a Newtown garden presumably after 'dropping' on migration the night before and the latter in more typical paddock/ saltmarsh habitat at Charlemont demonstrating their characteristic 'squeaky cart-wheel' song-flight. **White-browed Woodswallows** have been seen on multiple occasions right across Geelong, travelling north on warm north winds, which again raises the question, where do they go south to then travel north into the warmer winds so typical of an El Niño spring/summer. A few records of these flocks including low numbers of **Masked Woodswallows** has been welcome news. A record of a **Dusky Woodswallow** at Swan Island struggling into a strengthening north wind on mid-September afternoon was an interesting record in terms of location and behaviour. Had the bird been blown south earlier in the day and was struggling over Swan Bay to reach more familiar habitat?

The annual arrival of **Pacific Koel** is another topic of great interest to

local birders and whilst the Highton bird(s) is/are now a regular occurrence, the record of a bird at Meredith was excellent. **Pallid Cuckoos** are another of the birds that can be few and far between depending on the spring season and so it was great to hear of one at Freshwater Creek at the end of August, fitting perfectly with our expected first arrival of this species.

Several records of **Rose Robins** at the Geelong Botanic Gardens and Barwon River in Highton were significant as were the **Forest Ravens** at Foxhow, cementing the occurrence of these otherwise coastal corvids right up into the Lismore area of southwestern Victoria. **Gang-gang Cockatoos** remain a firm community favourite and it was interesting to get records as far apart as Wombat Forest and Lorne. The familiar and edifying calls of the **Australian Reed Warbler** have been welcomed calling right across our whole district, a sure marker of spring.

A small flock of seven **Blue-winged Parrots** at Cargerie was a delight and **Musk Lorikeets** in a hollow at She Oaks probably represented breeding. A leucistic **New Holland Honeyeater** at Leopold understandably caught the observer's attention. A **Sacred Kingfisher** at a new location in Highton was most interesting.

Spring is a time to start looking for arriving shorebirds and there have already been some great things seen. A **Common Sandpiper** at Lake Colac was unusual and twelve **Latham's Snipe** at Jerringot on the November Snipe Survey was a relief after a very poor year last year. A duo of **Bar-tailed Godwits** at Sparrovale was a thrill as were six **Sooty Oystercatchers** on Ocean Grove spit, a large flock for our local coast. **Banded Lapwings** numbering 24 in a paddock in Anakie were most welcome and the thoroughly widespread **Masked Lapwing** has delighted a local enthusiast with young on the nature strip.

Wetlands are beginning to dry somewhat now and so many interesting observations have come in from the far reaches of our district. Six **Australian Pelicans** were seen at Jerringot, presumably stragglers from the 17 seen earlier. **Australian Spotted Crakes** appear to have had a wonderful breeding season with good numbers seen across several different wetland habitats. A record of 17 at Sparrovale predominantly hugging the lignum margins was noteworthy as were records of five at Point Henry and seven at Queenscliff. A **Spotless Crake** at Point Henry was lovely and three **Great Crested Grebes** offshore at Thirteenth Beach were unexpected.

A nice flock of **Hardhead**, numbering over 100, at Lake Victoria was a wonderful record and six **Kelp Gulls** flying past at Black Rock was stunning for our coast. **Blue-billed Ducks** are always a treat, and it was pleasing that 65 were recorded at Lake Struan during the western lakes bird survey in early November along with **Pink-eared Ducks.** During the same survey 375 **Australasian Shovelers**, 1800 **Pink-eared Ducks** and 251 **Blue-billed Ducks** were recorded at Lake Rosine, often a hotspot for ducks. A very large flock of 115 **White-faced Herons** at Queenscliff was eye catching as were three **White-necked Herons** at Jerringot, unexpected together, all hunting frogs.

By the time you read this Craig will have given a presentation, on the club's behalf, at the biennial Australasian Ornithological Conference, this time in Brisbane. He was invited to present and will talk about the evolution of the *Geelong Bird Report* as part of a symposium on *using eBird and Birdata to understand the distribution, abundance and changes in regional bird faunas*.

We wish all our readers well for the coming months, may it be a time of recreation and peace and enjoyment, stay safe and well and enjoy the birds.

Imperial Jezebels

Wendy Cook

I didn't see the tiny yellow eggs, each with 16 ribs running down their length. The female Imperial Jezebel butterflies laid them on mistletoe leaves, in clusters of up to one hundred. They hatched out as little yellow-brown caterpillars with black heads and began eating leaves. When I first saw them, they had grown to be large black caterpillars.

I was part of a group walking in the Meredith Police Paddocks in the middle of June 2022. Someone saw a bird that looked like a robin, with a glossy black head and back and a bright red throat. However, this bird had a black stripe down its pale belly, and bright red feathers under its tail. It was not a robin, but a male Mistletoebird. His favourite food is the fruit of mistletoes. The sticky seeds pass through his digestive system in a few minutes and are deposited onto a tree branch. Here they can grow into new mistletoe plants. Our interest in the bird's behaviour led us to look in low-hanging clumps of mistletoe for the oval-shaped yellow-green fruits, which we eventually found. This is also where I found the caterpillars.

Most of the Imperial Jezebel caterpillars were dispersed on the leaves and stalks of the drooping mistletoe plant. They were black with scattered short white hairs and a few longer hairs, which grew from white dots on their bodies. More surprising were six caterpillars which had changed their colour to maroon, although they still had black heads and white hairs and dots. They were resting on a filmy white web woven between leaves and stalks of the mistletoe. All had their heads facing upwards and they only moved a little. I was curious about this behaviour, and checked a book when I got home. It said that the caterpillars pupate on a communal web, head upwards and attached to the web by a fine silk girdle. The larvae have glands inside their body which make this silk. Strands of it come out of a spinneret on their head, and dry in air.

My curiosity about the caterpillars continued, so I decided to check on them regularly, to watch their journey as they changed to pupae, then butterflies. I returned five days later. The six caterpillars on the web were motionless. They were a bit shorter and plumper than when I last saw them, and each had a fine line of silk around its body holding it in place. My next visit a week later was more exciting. Four of the six caterpillars were now pupae. They had become shorter and broader again, each inside a hard shell with a ridge running down the middle of its back. On this ridge was a line of spines, with a few more spines on each side. Two prongs, like miniature antennae, stuck out from their heads. Their colours intrigued me. One was shiny black, in places reflecting the blue of the sky. Another was a combination of brilliant orange, red and black. The remaining two appeared to be changing between the bright colouring and the black. At the tail end of each pupa was a screwed up, black, hairy lump, their old caterpillar skin, shrivelled and dry.

On this visit, I found another web. It was much longer and stretched between small branches of a Black Wattle tree. On it were about 40 maroon caterpillars, some unmoving, while others still wriggled, seeking their place to pupate. Higher up in the tree's branches was the mistletoe, where they had hatched from their eggs and fed. In the following weeks, I found three more clumps of mistletoe that were homes to small numbers of caterpillars.

I kept watch on them as June changed to July, then August, visiting regularly and seeing them feeding on mistletoe leaves and later becoming pupae. They were brightly coloured initially, but after a few days had changed to uniform glossy black.

When the first warm days of September arrived, I hoped they would leave their pupae, but it wasn't until the end of the month that I saw my first Imperial Jezebel adults. Two of them were perched on their web, which was now slightly brown and shrunken. Their bright and contrasting colours make them obvious, golden furry

bodies, long black antennae and legs, pale grey eyes and brilliant wings of black, white, red and yellow. They were resting and in no rush to move. A few black pupae had been broken open, the shell peeled back where its occupant had scrambled out. One pupa had a butterfly that was emerging, its head, legs and golden body out, white and black wings rumpled and partly out. It didn't move. On my next visit, it was still there, dead. I learnt that not all butterflies manage the journey out of their pupa successfully.

I continued my observations, seeing broken pupae, a few butterflies resting and occasionally, one that hadn't made it. Then, one day I was in the right place at the right moment. There was a split along the back and top of a pupa. I could see grey eyes and grey fur on its head, folded legs and antennae and a hint of golden body fur. Over the next few minutes, I watched the effort required to haul itself free of its pupa. It moved down the web and hung below the pupa, its body fat, its wings shorter than its abdomen. For the next ten minutes, it pumped liquid from its body into its wings, the body becoming slender, while the wings expanded until they were longer than the abdomen, which was now hidden beneath them. White with black edging on the hidden upper surface of its wings showed it to be a male. The tops of females' wings are duller with more black. The butterfly rested, his wings blown by the wind, which helped them to dry. Perhaps he was recovering from his labours and adjusting again to the world outside the black shell that had housed him for many weeks. When he was ready, his instincts would tell him how to use his new body, first exercising his muscles, after which he would fly. Here is a link to the video I took that day.

So far, I have only seen one Imperial Jezebel adult flying at the Police Paddocks. In a different location, on a sunny day, I saw many flying around clumps of mistletoe. There were no obvious pupae and most of the butterflies were male. Perhaps they were feeding from long, narrow, red mistletoe flowers, or seeking females to mate and begin the lifecycle of egg, larva, pupa, adult again. I wonder where the caterpillars that grew to adulthood in the Police Paddocks have gone. They may have flown to nearby gardens. If you live close by, you might see them. Watch for a female laying eggs on a hanging clump of olive-green mistletoe leaves. If you find eggs, you have the chance to watch the remarkable changes in these insects' lives over the next few months.

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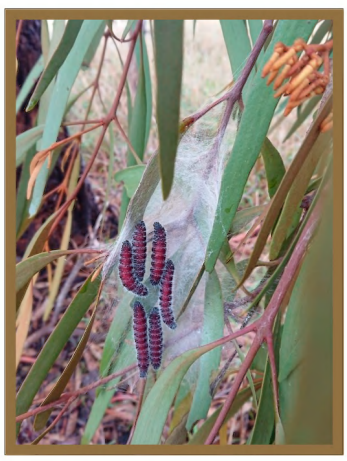

Photos: Wendy Cook

Orange-bellied Parrot News from the Bellarine Peninsula and beyond

Craig Morley,
Bellarine Peninsula Orange-bellied Parrot Regional Group Co-ordinator

Excitement in October

Over three weeks in October 2023 a total of seven migrant Orange-bellied Parrots (OBPs) were observed in the Lake Connewarre area. This was a very exciting and informative time! The birds were associating with the surviving adult male from the 2021 May Lake Connewarre captive-bred release and were feeding on seed-heads and flowers of Carpetweed *Galenia pubescens*. One wild-bred first year M was also seen feeding on green shoots of lignum *Duma florulenta* and nibbling the flower/ seeds of Wild Mustard *Sisymbrium officinale*.

In addition to five banded birds (uniquely identified with their bands—two wild-bred and three Feb Melaleuca captive-bred releases) there were two unbanded birds that could be distinguished as unique birds with different head moults. As well as these seven birds there were two additional migrant OBPs in April and May on the Bellarine Peninsula so we can account for at least nine migrant OBPs through 2023!

A total 13 OBPs was confirmed on the mainland in 2023.

At the time of writing all these birds with known band details (ten) have been confirmed as returns to Melaleuca (N.B. this allows for the two unbanded birds and the 2023 February Melaleuca captive-bred release bird we were never able to confirm the letter band).

Melaleuca Progress Report

As of 20 November 2023, 77 OBPs have been confirmed as returned to Melaleuca in SW Tasmania, which is equal to last year's record 77 returns!

The web address for checking NRE news updates can be found here.

2023 OBP surveys

Once more sincere thanks go to all the intrepid volunteers who conducted surveys on the Bellarine Peninsula in **May, July and September**. All your efforts are greatly appreciated. Special thanks to Robin Leppitt who conducted the **September** surveys in my absence. Also special thanks to those who have sent along emails and messages of support and encouragement—it is all greatly appreciated! Thank you!

2024 OBP survey dates

Please add these to your diary:

Saturday/Sunday
18 and 19 May 2024
27 and 28 July 2024
14 and 15 September 2024

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